And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers

Malachi 4 v 6

Cameron Black,
Care Van Manager

My wife recently gave birth to our second child; we were very blessed to have another healthy boy. He will grow up in a family who love him and want God’s best for him. It is terrible to think that so many of the people we serve on the Care Van may not have had this basic need met. It has been suggested that homelessness often has its roots very early in someone’s life as they grow up in an environment which is anything but loving.

I want to thank those of you who are the mothers and fathers in our society; those of you who find yourselves more advanced in years. Thank you to those who have served for years and years on the Care Van, showing love to lost “children” in our society. Those of us who are perhaps younger have a lot to learn from the faithfulness, steadfastness and consistency you have shown over the decades. Thank you so much for living for God and for bringing others up into his love and mission.

The Care Van has been running since 1990 and there are many of you who have been there from almost the very beginning. There are some in this bracket who have moved on as they have come to an age where it seems good to them to do so. Do you know of long serving volunteers who have recently moved on, of whom we at ECM and Bethany should hear about? We would love to know their stories of serving on the Care Van. Perhaps you are reading this and thinking to step down from serving too. Please don’t go without saying goodbye! We want to honour you for what you have done. If you are thinking to retire from service, is there someone in your church who may be good to bring in and train up, to pass on the torch?

No matter your age or experience, I again thank you for the love, care and provision shown to those who have been denied these things.
How often do we look back? Do we need to? Lot’s wife only did it once and she should not have been hankering after the sinful life of the cities of the plains. In the Care Van, each time the driver makes a manoeuvre he should ‘look back’ before signalling and then executing the manoeuvre - says the Highway Code. Without a functional wing mirror the Care Van would officially be illegal to use on the road or go out day or night.

So what? To see to the rear, the wing mirrors have to protrude. In protruding they are most liable to be damaged by other objects/vehicles. Nowadays they are very sophisticated. They can tilt in two directions via an electric motor, defrost by heating wires, include a repeater indicator light, can hinge inwards flat. Their plastic coving makes them very aerodynamic and they often match the bodywork paint and colour.

So, how much do they cost to replace? Quite a sum of money! Skilfully from an insurer’s point of view their cost always seems to be a little less than anyone’s insurance ‘excess’! So the result is that whenever they suffer damage - accidental, unnoticed, caused by a wall or other vehicle or even caused carelessly, Bethany Christian Trust and Edinburgh City Mission have to ‘fork out’ and pay to replace them with funds that they might otherwise better use to further their work helping the homeless.

So, just a thought, if on your watch a wing mirror is damaged so as to need repair/replacement, would your church, your team or even yourself be able and willing to make an extra generous donation to Bethany to further their work amongst the homeless and to make up for or contribute towards the depletion of funds? On the other hand if your funds are strapped, or are likely to be, then Bethany can arrange for free, expert and very friendly driving experience to increase driving skills for the Van, as well as folks’ awareness of the width and length of the Care Van!

We are talking about hundreds of pounds here and probably the most frequent and expensive Care Van cost. Further details from Cameron Black about donations and/or ‘lessons’. Thank you! Although this article refers only to wing mirrors it extends out beyond them!
"You should give the Care Van up, you have got too much on – you never have a minute to yourself and you have no time with me!"

"Absolutely NOT!" I replied with more strength in my voice than I intended. My concerned friend was taken aback. I am usually fairly relaxed, reflective, and open to listening to others' ideas.

People traditionally view volunteering as the volunteer giving something to the community, but that really isn't my experience of the Care Van. It is a true privilege to meet the service users, it doesn't feel like work on any level. The giving is a two way street with the service users giving the volunteers as much as we give them. A night on the Care Van is a night filled with good company, interesting conversation, fresh air and good use of skills. It is a night where I learn lots and on occasion share my learning. It is a night of unpredictable nature but ultimately there is usually good humour with people pulling together.

Each time I go out on the Care Van I meet people who inspire me. I have had conversations about politics, drugs, poetry, dogs, music, benefit systems, ghosts, books, the Festival, morals, housing, drama, mental health, soup and everything in between. On occasion, faith has had a look in too! And these conversations are just with the service users!

But the general chit chat is just one aspect of our interaction. Some nights I am privileged to be able to listen to somebody's story. I have heard many, but no matter the individual circumstance (it's not my place to divulge that here), what always comes across is the courage, the pain and ultimately the fact that people have survived trauma or are surviving in traumatic circumstances.

Sure, they might be struggling, fighting to survive, wrestling with addictions, mental ill health, poverty, etc, but they are here standing talking to me, accepting companionship on some level, possibly reaching out for help. It's a scary world sometimes and to do any of the above can take great effort, real strength and much courage – I admire that and I am often humbled.

We are all ever only one step away from being homeless. It just takes a relationship break up, debt, addiction, a period of physical or mental ill health, job loss or perhaps bereavement. Any of these things plus a whole host of other circumstances can leave somebody vulnerably housed.

I hope that, should I ever be in that position, I am as strong as the service users I meet. So, for as long as the service users need us and for as long as my team members will have me, I won't consider giving the Care Van up. It keeps me grounded!
Lunchtime Project—exciting news!
Ruth Longmuir, Project Coordinator

We’re pleased to announce that the Lunchtime Care Van will shortly be operating on a fourth day each week. In addition to the runs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, the van will begin to go out on a Thursday, hopefully from the beginning of April. The service has now been in operation for 14 months and it is apparent from the number of people accessing it that there is a need for it in our city. We dream that one day it will be able to operate every lunchtime but for now we are excited to see it expand to four days a week.

Please remember...

Whether you are a lunchtime or an evening Care Van volunteer it is really important that you and your team spend five minutes cleaning and tidying both the van and the kitchen when you return to the Centre. Please remember that another team will be arriving in perhaps just a few hours, and they will find the van and the kitchen as you left them. Space is a problem in the kitchen so please make full use of the cupboards and make sure the water flasks are returned to the van. These simple things will make a big difference to the smooth running of the service. Thank you!

Contact Details

Cameron Black, Care Van Manager (BCT)  
0131 454 3132 / carevan@bethanychristiantrust.com

Ruth Longmuir, for Lunchtime Care Van & all volunteer paperwork (BCT)  
0131 454 3132 / carevan@bethanychristiantrust.com

Ann Laidlaw, for evening Care Van rota (ECM)  
0131 225 9445 / annlaidlaw@ecm.org.uk